

County Zoning Board approves Long Reach center plans, keeping redevelopment project on track



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ELLCOTT CITY, MD – Howard County Executive Allan H. Kittleman today applauded the county's Zoning Board for approving the redevelopment plan for the Long Reach Village Center, clearing the way for developers to begin a much anticipated overhaul of the 44-year-old center in Columbia.

"Last night, the redevelopment plan cleared another significant hurdle, allowing us to keep this project on track," Kittleman said. "The community has repeatedly expressed support for the project, through public engagement meetings and review by the Long Reach Community Association and others. The plan is innovative, economically sustainable and encompasses key components requested by the community. We are now on our way to getting a center built that Long Reach residents will embrace and be eager to use."

The comprehensive redevelopment of the 7.7 acre county-owned parcel had already made its way through multiple planning requirements and processes, including unanimous support from the Long Reach Community Association and Howard County Planning Board. Approval by the Zoning Board, which is made up of the five current County Council members, was the next

major step needed for the county to complete the sale of the center to the developer – Orchard Development Corporation – so construction can begin.

"The Orchard Development team is thrilled with the favorable vote by the zoning board last night. We appreciate the decision to hear our case prior to the June election cycle [which would have postponed the hearing]," said Scott Armiger, President of Orchard Development. "It has been a pleasure working with the Long Reach Community Association and the community to develop an exciting and comprehensive plan. All the community meetings were positive and informative. We look forward to moving on to the next steps."

"This entire process is a great example of how a developer and the community can work together," said Nina Basu, Chair of the Long Reach Village Board. "The community strongly supported the original concept plan. As the process progressed, the developer requested less stringent minimums to ensure flexibility to make the project economically feasible. We met with the developer several times, and we worked out minimum standards that the community could accept, but which would give the developer more flexibility."

Currently, the majority of the center's stores and office spaces sit vacant, including the large shell of a former grocery store. The Columbia Association continues to maintain the Columbia Art Center and offices in Stonehouse, located near the back of the property. Orchard Development has entered discussions with the Columbia Association to include its property as part of the overall redevelopment, eventually moving the art center and village offices into a new building within the redeveloped center.

Orchard's conceptual plan includes outdoor public spaces with a village green, plaza and square; at least 70,000 square feet of commercial, community and office space; 132 multi-family housing units, 110 senior housing units, 73 for-sale townhomes and structured and surface parking.

The redevelopment came close to being derailed earlier this year, but Kittleman and members of the community pushed hard to advance the project. The Zoning Board decided to schedule a hearing May 7, continuing it on May 14 and 16. The project ultimately passed with a 4-1 vote.

"We appreciate the input and energy from residents urging the Zoning Board to move forward. The community has been a tremendous partner throughout this process and has played a major role in making it happen," Kittleman said.

Howard County purchased the Long Reach center in 2014 under a previous administration with the goal of revitalizing what had been designated a "blighted" property. Orchard's proposal was selected after an extensive community input period that included multiple public engagement meetings and the development of a Re-Imagine Long Reach Village Center plan.

Details of the proposal and other information regarding Re-imagine Long Reach can be found at www.howardcountymd.gov/longreach.